

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
January 19, 2023

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Charles Donahue. Also present were: Tony Mullin, Maya Khuri Plotkin, Amanda Phillips; and Dorothy Parmelee. Superintendent Emily Parks and Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the District.

Westwood Media Center was recognized for providing a live-stream of the meeting.

Harley Pease recorded the minutes.

Superintendent's Report

Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships Webpage

Superintendent Parks introduced the creation of the new equity webpage on the District's website. Additionally, Superintendent Parks provided an overview and impetus for the creation of the webpage.

MSBA response to Sheehan Statement of Interest

Superintendent Parks provided an update on the Sheehan Statement of Interest. The MSBA rejected the District's statement of interest for the Sheehan School.

Student Services Director search update

Assistant Superintendent Borchers provided an update on the Director of Student Services. Assistant Superintendent Borchers noted that the committee met in person this week. Additionally, Assistant Superintendent Borchers noted that the process will include forums, reference checks, feedback, and more.

Public Comment

Ellen Siegel of Alder Rd. spoke in support of Westwood educators. Ms. Siegel noted that cuts in the budget, specifically at the middle school level, would be concerning.

Jay Wasserman of Birch Tree Dr. raised concerns about potentially cutting technology positions and detailed the need for technological support for students and educators.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's update

Chair Donahue provided an update on the District's response to COVID. Chair Donahue noted that the Board of Health is keeping an eye on COVID data.

Chair Donahue announced the return of the Dale Carnegie course offering for J-term.

Chair Donahue announced that he will be retiring from the school committee at the end of his term.

School building project update

Maya Plotkin provided an update on the new school building. The topping-off beam ceremony happened with students and administrators having signed the beam. The project is on schedule and on budget right now. Steel has continued to go up and the noise of the project is not as loud as expected. There is a good view of the building project from Laura Ln. Progress continues to be made.

Policy review subcommittee

Amanda Phillips provided an update on the policy review subcommittee. Section G contains a policy that the committee will be reviewing in order to ensure programs, such as mini courses, can continue to run.

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Student Representative Riley Harrington spoke about how Legislative Council is trying to lead a campaign around idling cars in the student parking lot during S-block.

Superintendent search update

Maya Plotkin provided an update on the superintendent search committee. Ms. Plotkin asked the community to fill out the community survey. Ms. Plotkin noted that the search committee chose Jim Hardy of MASC to lead the search.

Extended Day Working Group – Proposed rate changes

Dori Parmelee thanked Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste for her work on the Extended Day Working Group.

Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste provided an overview of the extended day tuition recommendations. Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste detailed two options for the rate increase in 2023-2024 school year, including benefits, tuition change, short Wednesdays, monthly tuition (5 day vs. 4 day), and staffing impacts.

Tony Mullin asked what the ratio is right now for the 2022-2023 school year. Lemma Jn-baptiste said that we are currently closer to option A as we have high school students who work extended day.

Maya Plotkin asked if both options would cover the current deficit and make us net neutral going forward. Lemma Jn-baptiste said that they would cover the current deficit as well as break even in future years. It is basically an offset increase. It would be a way to 'catch-up'.

Tony Mullin noted that he would like to go with option B.

Maya Plotkin noted that option B gets us to where we want to be without a shock to parents. Maya also wanted to look at this again in another year so that we stay up-to-date.

Dori Parmelee asked about enrichment and what other districts do in regards to enrichment. Lemma Jn-baptiste noted that Extended Day Director Michael Fagone has been canvassing other communities.

Charlie Donahue asked about what can be done about the large number families on the waitlist. Lemma Jn-baptiste said that there are a couple of measures that can be done. One of which is opening enrollment earlier. Another is to maybe cap the waitlist.

Charlie Donahue asked about financial assistance for families who are lower-income. Lemma Jn-baptiste said the District is committed to tuition reduction for families that need it.

Tony Mullin asked if there are allowances for two ABA tutors in both options A and B. Lemma Jn-baptiste said yes.

Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste thanked Interim Director Michael Fagone for the legwork he has done for the extended day working group.

The School Committee voiced support for "Option B". A vote will occur at the next School Committee meeting.

Discussion Items

Proposed FY'24 Budget

Superintendent Parks provided a detailed overview of the FY'24 proposed budget.

Context to FY'24 included the following items:

- Inflationary pressures
- Special education costs

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- Fuel costs

FY'24 budget recommends a higher increase than in the last several years. It would take 5.6% to have a level services budget. FY'24 budget reflects a cut to level services. FY'24 budget was developed using multiple strategies:

- Increase to offsets
- Increase in user fee revenue
- Reduction in staff
- Making our best assumptions about contract settlements
- Working collaboratively with the Town

Tony Mullin asked about capital funding that potentially could be financed through grant funding. Lemma Jn-baptiste noted that solar canopy money would not be available this year.

Tony Mullin also noted that the science position cuts are worrisome. Superintendent Parks agreed.

Superintendent Parks noted that this budget only reflects Tier 1 of cuts. Superintendent Parks noted that Tier 2 of cuts would be needed if the District did not achieve a 4.5% increase.

Chair Donahue asked if another school committee meeting prior to February's meeting to discuss budget. The committee said that an additional meeting was not necessary.

Dori Parmelee noted that she was glad to see that there were not cuts to the student services department. Superintendent Parks agreed and noted that the District attempted to listen to staff needs and have the budget reflect staff needs.

Action Items

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the December 8th meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the December 15th meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the January 6th meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes

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Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to approve the dates for the 2023-2024 school year calendar. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The committee tabled Instructional Assistant ratification vote as details are being finalized.

New Business

Dori Parmelee asked if we could read out the Equity Audit. Superintendent Parks said that the results are not available yet, but will be read when it is available.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Tony Mullin to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11pm.